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ABSTRACT

In recent years, both American and Japanese people have experienced dramatic changes in the world of work. To compare Japanese and American work ethics and attitudes toward women's employment, Japanese and English versions of the Work/Family Ethic questionnaire were completed by 205 middle-aged Japanese and American adults. An analysis of the results indicated that Japanese respondents, when compared with Americans, preferred large to small organizations, were more group oriented, more patriotic, more loyal to employer and family, and more desirous of leisure time. Compared with Americans, Japanese respondents were more likely to believe that women's place should be in the home, that wives' or mothers' employment might be harmful to marriage or children, and that mothers should not work outside the home when there are children in the family. By contrast, American respondents were more likely to believe that women could handle both home and career, that women should be free to choose whether they work outside the home or not, and that women should feel free to work despite husbands' feelings or the presence of children in the family. Future research should focus on the work ethics and attitudes of different age cohorts.
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A Comparison of Japanese and American Work and Family Values

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A Comparison of Japanese and American Work and Family Values

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ABSTRACT

This study compares Japanese and American work ethics and attitudes toward women's employment. Japanese and English versions of the Work/Family Ethic questionnaire were distributed to 205 middle-aged Japanese and Americans. The results of *t*-tests indicated that Japanese respondents, when compared with Americans, preferred large to small organizations, were more group oriented, more patriotic, more loyal to employer and family, and more desirous of leisure time. Americans tended to place a higher value on individualism and self-employment. Compared with Americans, Japanese respondents were more likely to believe that women's place should be in the home, that wife's or mother's employment might be harmful to marriage or children, and that mothers should not work outside the home when there are children in the family. By contrast, American respondents were more likely to believe that women could handle both home and career, that women should be free to choose whether they work outside the home or not, and that women should feel free to work despite husbands' feelings or presence of children in the family.

A Comparison of Japanese and American

Work and Family Values

Japanese work and family values developed in the context of Confucian traditions. American work and family values developed in the context of Judeo-Christian traditions. These traditions can be construed as being markedly different. Thus cross-cultural differences in work and family values are often assumed. While Japanese and American peoples come from different traditions, both have experienced urbanization and industrialization, and both find themselves in a post-industrialized age. Technological advances have facilitated contact and communication such that traditional differences can be expected to diminish over time. The extent to which modern Japanese and Americans differ in work and family values is unknown. This research attempts to identify differences and similarities in the expressed work and family values of modern Japanese and Americans, and to analyze findings in terms of cultural traditions and social, political, and economic changes.

In recent years, both American and Japanese peoples have witnessed, indeed experienced, dramatic changes in the world of work. While American workers experienced a decline in relative productivity and profits, Japanese workers performed technological and economic "miracles" (Morrow, 1983:20), in the international marketplace. America's traditional or "protestant" work ethic

(Weber, 1930) appears to be in danger of being "lost," as reflected in the titles of the pertinent literature: "What happened to the work ethic?" (Maccoby & Terzi, 1981), "Whither the work ethic?" (Dynamic Years, 1984), and "What is the point of working?" (Time, 1981). Yet there seems to be a growing interest, if not fascination, with japanese work ethic and management styles (e.g., Ouchi's Theory Z and Morishima's Why has Japan Succeeded?). The popular press (e.g., Kraft, 1983) often assumes that Japanese success is related to Confucian traditions and values. Similarly, the Japanese or Confucian work ethic is assumed to be an important factor in the remarkable academic achievement of Japanese (and other Asian) American students in the American school system (e.g., Lewthwaite, 1983; McGrath, 1983; and Shearer, 1984).

Families in both America and Japan have changed over the years (Hutter, 1981; Ishihara, 1981; Kumagai, 1983, 1984; Mochizuki, 1981; Schulz, 1982). In America, women have joined the work force in record numbers, and attitudes toward women's employment are slowly changing (Engel, 1978). Similarly, in Japan, there has been an increase of women in the work force (Kumagai, 1984), and some devaluation of housewifery (Libra, 1984). Nevertheless, many women are still expected to devote most of their lives to a traditional "place" of home and family (Matsunaga, 1980). Indeed, Japanese housewives' home-management roles earn world-wide respect (e.g., Porter, 1981). Nevertheless, Japanese women who work outside the home experience discrimination and seldom obtain equal rights or benefits from an employer (Carrel, 1983; Lohr, 1984). The

worlds of men and women are still separate and segregated in Japan (O'Reilly, 1983). While more Japanese women join the work force, little is known regarding attitudes toward women's employment in modern Japan.

Method

The Work/Family Ethic questionnaire was designed to assess work and family related values. Items were constructed to reflect traditional confucian ethics, traditional puritan and protestant work ethics, attitudes toward women and women's employment, and various employment and family characteristics. Items offered a Likert scale response format: strongly agree to strongly disagree. After pretesting, the English version of the questionnaire was translated into Japanese. The two language versions were tested for equivalency by expert judges, including "back translation" (Brislin, 1980), and revised accordingly.

Questionnaires were distributed to over 1000 Japanese and American tourists who visited Hawaii in 1983 and 1984. A subsample of 205 middle aged Japanese and Americans was selected for purposes of analysis, in an attempt to control for possible effects of age on values and attitudes. To control for possible sex differences, subjects were categorized into groups of men (n = 107) and women (n = 98) for separate analysis. T-tests were used to test for significance of differences between Japanese and American men, and between Japanese and American women.

The average age of Japanese men and women was 47 years of age, compared with 48 for American men and women. Japanese men averaged 14 years of formal education, compared with 15 for American men. Japanese women averaged 12 years of formal education compared with 14 for American women. Ninety-seven percent of the Japanese men were employed full-time, compared with 81 percent of the American men, 38 percent of the Japanese women, and 56% of the American women. Fifty-eight percent of the Japanese women considered themselves "housewives," compared with 23 percent of the American women. Japanese workers averaged 6 days of work per week while American workers averaged 5 days of work per week. Ninety-three percent of Japanese men were married, compared with 76 percent of American men, 85 percent of Japanese women, and 80 percent of American women. Average household size was 5 people for Japanese men and women, and 4 people for American men and women.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the results of comparisons of work ethics of Japanese and American men and women, in terms of mean responses to each item and *t*-tests of significance of differences between groups. Japanese and American men were found to differ significantly ($p < .05$) on nine of 12 work ethic items. Japanese and American women were found to differ significantly on 11 out of 12 work ethic items.

Insert Table 1 about here

Japanese traditions encourage a group consciousness and a concern for group harmony (Morishima, 1982). In contrast, American traditions place a high value on individualism and individual freedom. These differences appear to be reflected in the responses to work ethic items 1 and 2 (Table 1). Significantly ($p < .001$) more Japanese men and women, than American men and women, agreed that "One should take an active part in all group affairs." Similarly, significantly ($p < .001$) more American men and women than Japanese men and women agreed that "Individual freedom is more important than group solidarity." Such results can be seen to support and extend Hofstede's (1980) findings related to international differences in employee management attitudes.

In American traditions of work ethic, the independent individual who "stands alone" (as opposed to working interdependently in groups) is valued highly. Indeed, being self-employed is an ideal for many Americans. This aspect of America's individualism is reflected in work ethic item 3 (Table 1), which states, "I would like to be my own boss." The attitudes of Japanese and American men and women differed significantly ($p < .001$ and $p < .05$, respectively) on this item. American men and women tended to agree whereas Japanese men and women tended to be uncertain whether or not they

would like to be self-employed.

In contrast to American ideals of individualism, independence, and self employment, the traditional Japanese emphasis on groups and cooperative team work may be expressed in a preference for employment in a relatively large organization rather than a small one. Item 4 (Table 1) reflects preferences for size of company. While the majority of respondents tended to be uncertain, significantly more Japanese men and women than American men and women ($p < .01$, $p < .001$, respectively) agreed that "A large corporation is generally a more desirable place to work than a small company."

All cultures may be seen as valuing loyalty. Nevertheless, Japanese Confucian traditions seem to emphasize loyalty more than most other traditions, including those of America. Indeed, according to Morishima (1982), the relatively high emphasis on loyalty differentiates Confucianism as it developed in Japan from Confucianism as it developed in China. One might expect any differences in the loyalty values of Japanese and Americans to be expressed in terms of loyalties to country, employer, work group, and family.

Loyalty to country, or patriotism, is reflected in work ethic item 5 (Table 1). While both Japanese and American groups agreed that "It is important to me that my work serves my country, indirectly if not directly," Japanese men and women tended to agree significantly ($p < .001$, $p < .01$, respectively) more than American men and women.

Loyalty to employer is reflected in work ethic items 6 and 7 (Table 1). American men and women tended to disagree significantly ($p < .001$) more, than Japanese men and women, with the statement: "A worker should be loyal and stay with the same employer until retirement." Similarly, Japanese men and women tended to agree significantly ($p < 001$, $p < .05$, respectively) more than American men and women, that "Out of loyalty to my employer, I would reject a job offer from another company willing to pay a higher salary."

Loyalty to family, i.e. parents, is reflected in work ethic item 8 (Table 1). While Japanese tended to be uncertain, Americans tended to disagree with the statement that "Students should work for good grades out of respect and honor for their parents," the differences between groups were significant ($p < .05$) for women but not men.

Traditionally, education was and is a very important means to achievement and success in Japan. Indeed, in modern Japan, educational pressures begin very early in life and appear to be related to a high rate of suicide among young people (Eastham, 1984). Only the best, i.e., the elite, are accepted in Japanese universities. In contrast, education is more relaxed, and ideally available to everyone in America. The importance of education is reflected in work ethic item 9 (Table 1). Both Japanese and American groups agreed that "Education leads to success and promotion in the world of work," and their differences were not significant. Such findings could serve to raise questions regarding

the causes of youth suicide in Japan. And such findings seem to contradict or at least call into question some of the popular explanations for the phenomenal success of Asian Americans in the American school system (e.g., Lewthwaite, 1983; McGrath, 1983; and Shearer, 1984), where that success is assumed to be the result of cultural and parental stress on education.

American Protestant work ethic traditions held that hard work would be rewarded (Maccoby & Terzi, 1981; Weber, 1930). Failure was sometimes assumed to be the result of not trying hard enough. Japanese Confucian traditions also valued hard work. Work ethic item 10 (Table 1) reflects the hard work value theme. While both groups tended to be uncertain about whether or not "People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough," Japanese tended to agree significantly ($p < .05$) more than Americans with this item.

Both Japanese and American work ethic traditions stressed the intrinsic value of work. This value is sometimes expressed by individuals who continue to work, despite low pay, because they enjoy the work. Some individuals maintain that they would still want to work, perhaps as volunteers, even if they were not paid. The opposite belief, that work is distasteful and to be avoided if possible, is sometimes taken as evidence of the decline of the traditional work ethic. Item 11 (Table 1) reflects this attitude. American men and women tended to agree significantly ($p < .01$, $p < .001$, respectively) more than Japanese men and women, that "Many employees have an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it

if they can." This suggests that the American work ethic may have undergone more of a "decline" than the Japanese work ethic.

Related to the work ethic theme of intrinsic work value is the corresponding value attached to leisure. To the extent that work has high intrinsic value, it can be seen as "play" and an appropriate part of leisure activity. When work has low intrinsic value, there is more desire for non-work leisure activity or recreation. Item 12 (Table 1) reflects the leisure theme of work ethic. Both Japanese and Americans tended to agree that "People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation." Nevertheless, Japanese men and women agreed with this statement significantly ($p < .001$) more than did American men and women. This initially appears to be inconsistant with the other findings that suggest that Japanese work ethic traditions have been maintained more than American work ethic traditions. Indeed, this finding is even more surprising considering that early forms of the American (i.e., puritan) work ethic considered leisure harmful and actively discouraged it (Maccoby & Terzi, 1981). On the other hand, such a difference could be explained in terms of different base rates. The Japanese workers in this study indicated that they worked an average of six days per week, while the American workers averaged 5 work days per week. This suggests that the American workers have more leisure time than the Japanese workers. Differences in desire for more leisure time, as found in this study, might disappear if the two groups had the same amount of leisure time as a base line.

Table 2 summarizes the results of comparisons of Japanese and American men and women on attitudes toward women and women's employment, in terms of mean responses to each item and t-tests of significance of differences between groups. Japanese and American men were found to differ significantly ($p < .05$) on five out of 11 items. Japanese and American women were found to differ significantly on eight out of 11 items.

Insert Table 2 about here

While Japanese and American men and women tended to believe that "Women are capable of handling both home and career" (item 1, Table 2), American women expressed significantly ($p < .001$) more certitude on this item than did Japanese women. This may reflect, to some extent, what Lebra (1984:247) calls the "rule of sphere segregation" in Japan. Japanese work ethic requires that the public/occupational sphere of life remain separate or segregated from the private/domestic sphere of life, and holds that the latter should not be allowed to interfere with the former. Because of this, career women cannot have domestic burdens, and either must remain unmarried and childless or arrange for a "surrogate housewife" to carry out domestic responsibilities (Libra, 1984).

As American women entered the labor market, concerns arose regarding potential effects of women's employment on their

marriages. Indeed, it was often assumed that a wife's employment would somehow hurt her husband and her marriage (Hewer & Neubeck, 1964). By the late 1970s, young adult Americans were much less concerned about potential harmful effects on husband or marriage (Engel, 1978). Item 2 (Table 2) reflects this concern for potential effects of women's employment on marriage. The results of this study suggest that middle-aged Americans and Japanese tend to be uncertain regarding whether or not "Difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife is employed outside the home." Nevertheless, Japanese women reported significantly ($p < .05$) greater agreement with this item than did American women.

The importance of husbands' feelings in the decision of women to work outside the home is reflected in item 3 (Table 2). Japanese men and women reported significantly ($p < .05$, $p < .001$, respectively) more agreement that "A wife should NOT work outside the home when her husband wants her home," than did American men and women. Indeed, while Japanese men and women tended to agree, American men and women tended to be uncertain about this issue. Similarly, Hendry (1981) reported that men in rural areas of Japan still often have the last word in decisions about work, despite the fact that such decisions are usually made after discussions that involve the whole family.

Freedom of choice with regards to employment outside the home was an important goal of sexual liberation in America during the 1960s and 1970s. Freedom to "remain a housewife" emerged as an issue for some Americans as more and more women chose careers and

work as their means to fulfillment. Item 4 (Table 2) reflects this issue. While both Japanese and American groups tended to agree that "A wife or mother should NOT work outside the home when she doesn't want to work outside the home," American men and women reported significantly ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively) stronger feelings on this issue than did Japanese men and women. This difference may result from other traditional values, i.e., the American ideal of individual freedom and the Japanese ideal of loyalty or duty to family.

In the traditions of both Japan and America, women had primary responsibility for rearing children. Indeed, objections to employment of women often involved the assumption that women are or will be mothers, and that motherhood should be their primary career. This belief is reflected in item 5 (Table 2): "Married women should be home, having or raising children, instead of being employed outside the home." The differences between Japanese and American groups on this item were significant ($p < .001$) for both men and women; Japanese tended to be uncertain while Americans tended to disagree.

Other traditional concerns regarding women's employment focus on potentially harmful effects on children and their development (Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Nye & Hoffman, 1963). Item 6 (Table 2) focuses on this concern, with the statement: "Maternal employment is likely to have harmful effects on children's development." While American men, and Japanese men and women tended to agree or be uncertain, American women reported significantly ($p < .001$) more

disagreement with this item.

When there is concern or objections to women's employment based on potential effects on children, concerns and objections may vary depending upon the age or stage of development of the child. For example, it is generally assumed that infants are much more vulnerable to the effects of "maternal deprivation" than are teenagers. Items seven through 10 (Table 2) reflect these concerns. All groups, Japanese men and women and American men and women, tended to agree that (item 7) "A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is an infant in the family." Similarly, all tended to agree that (item 8) "A mother should NOT work outside the home if there is a preschool-age child in the family." While Japanese women also agreed that (item 9) "A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is a school-age child in the family," American women, and Japanese and American men, tended to be uncertain about this. Japanese women tended to agree significantly ($p < .05$) more than American women with this item. With regards to whether or not (item 10) "A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is a teenage child in the family," Japanese men and women tended to agree significantly ($p < .05$ and $p < .001$), respectively) more than American men and women.

In summary, middle-aged Japanese men and women tended to believe that mothers should be in the home rather than be employed, whether there were an infant or teenager in the family. In contrast, middle-aged American men and women agreed that a mother should not work with infants and pre-school children in the family,

but felt uncertain when the children were school-age or older. Given the findings of other studies of younger Americans (e.g., Engel, 1978), younger samples might report less concern or objection to maternal employment.

Finally, subjects were asked whether or not they (item 11, Table 2) "could be happy as a full-time housewife or househusband." Japanese and American men differed significantly ($p < .001$) on this, with American men tending to disagree more than Japanese men. Initially, this finding might appear to be inconsistent with other findings that suggest that Japanese men are more conservative or traditional than American men. It may be that this item has questionnable validity for Japanese men, because there is no word for "househusband" in the Japanese language. The translated equivalent used in the Japanese version of the questionnaire may have been misunderstood, and responded to in terms of a desire for more leisure time. Thus, the results for men could be interpreted in terms of comparative needs for leisure, as opposed to attitudes toward househusband roles, which would be more consistent with the other findings of this study. On the other hand, there should be no question about interpretation of the results for women. In general, middle-aged Japanese women tended to agree that they could be happy as full-time housewives while middle-aged American women tended to be less certain about this. Research is needed to determine whether or not younger samples of Japanese and American women would feel the same way.

Generalizations from the results of this study should take into

account various limitations in the data. Both Japanese and Amerian samples were limited to middle-aged subjects. Additional research is needed to ascertain whether the same results would be obtained for other age groups, or indeed, whether work ethics and attitudes toward women's employment vary by age. One might expect differences between Japanese and Americans to be reduced for younger samples, assuming that younger samples have experienced relatively more contact and interaction between cultures following the second world war. Similarly, tourists visiting Hawaii tend to be middle class. One must be cautious about generalizing to any other class. Indeed, there can be no guarantee that either sample, Japanese or American, adequately represents Japanese or American populations.

Sex differences have been found in American attitudes toward women's employment (e.g., Engel, 1978, 1980). Assuming that sex differences might also exist in Japanese attitudes toward women's employment, and in American and Japanese work ethics, data were analyzed separately for each sex in this study. Additional research is needed to determine whether Japanese men and women differ significantly in their work ethics and attitudes toward women's employment, and to determine whether American men and women differ in work ethics.

The "quasi-experimental" (Campbell & Stanley, 1966) research strategy used in this study assumes exposure to different cultures to be different treatments and depends upon control of extraneous variables. Of particular concern in cross-cultural research are comparability of instruments and comparability of samples.

Every effort was made to insure that the English and Japanese versions of the questionnaire were equivalent. Independent "back translations" (Brislin, 1980) by expert judges, were used to identify problem areas. In most cases, when translations could not be made equivalent, items were discarded. However, translations for at least one item were not equivalent; in item 11 (Table 2), "househusband" has no equivalent Japanese term. Therefore, the results for men on this item must be interpreted with caution. There should be no question, however, regarding interpretation of the responses of women to the same item.

Similarly, every effort was made to insure that the two samples, Japanese and American, were equivalent, and that extraneous variables (e.g., sex and age) were controlled. The two groups were essentially equivalent on average age and education. However, a higher proportion of Japanese than American men, and of American women than Japanese women, reported being employed full time. And Japanese respondents tended to work more, reporting an average work week of 6 days in contrast to the reported American average of 5 work days. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of Japanese women reported being housewives than American women. Additional research is needed to assess the generalizability of such findings to Japanese and American populations, and to assess possible relationships between these variables and work and family values.

Conclusion

In summary, when compared with Americans, Japanese reported more agreement with work ethic statements that focused on: group cohesiveness, desirability of working for a large corporation, patriotism, loyalty to employer and family, importance of hard work to success, and needs for more leisure. Americans reported greater agreement with work ethic items that focused on individualism, self-employment, and dislike and avoidance of work. Compared with Americans, Japanese respondents were less likely to believe that women were capable of handling both home and career, more likely to expect marital difficulties as a result of wife's employment, more likely to believe that maternal employment is harmful to children, more likely to believe that women should stay home, and more likely to agree that a wife or mother should not work because of concerns for husband or children. By contrast, American respondents were more likely to believe that women could handle both home and career, that women should not work outside the home if they don't want to, and that women should feel free to work despite husbands' feelings or presence of children in the family.

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TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF JAPANESE AND AMERICAN WORK VALUES

Item	Men			Women		
	Japanese (n = 70) Mean	American (n = 37) Mean	t	Japanese (n = 50) Mean	American (n = 48) Mean	t
1. One should take an active part in all group affairs.	3.40	2.76	3.43***	3.51	2.83	3.54***
2. Individual freedom is more important than group solidarity.	2.91	3.73	-3.49***	2.65	3.79	-5.77***
3. I would like to be my own boss.	3.44	4.14	-3.96***	3.28	3.67	-2.14*
4. A large corporation is generally a more desirable place to work than a small company.	3.25	2.68	2.69**	3.38	2.33	6.53***
5. It is important to me that my work serves my country, indirectly if not directly.	4.11	3.46	3.76***	4.06	3.56	3.23**
6. A worker should be loyal and stay with the same employer until retirement.	2.90	2.19	3.68***	3.02	1.94	5.92***
7. Out of loyalty to my employer, I would reject a job offer from another company willing to pay a higher salary.	3.54	2.68	3.97***	3.22	2.67	2.61*
8. Students should work for good grades out of respect and honor for their parents.	2.73	2.43	1.25	2.90	2.44	2.17*
9. Education leads to success and promotion in the world of work.	3.87	3.97	-0.56	4.06	3.96	0.54
10. People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough.	3.48	3.00	2.35*	3.48	2.96	2.58*
11. Many employees have an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if they can.	2.61	3.35	-3.35**	2.54	3.50	-4.31***
12. People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation.	4.07	3.11	6.37***	3.98	3.21	4.50***

Note: Likert scale scoring, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF JAPANESE AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Item	Men			Women		
	Japanese (n = 69) Mean	American (n = 37) Mean	t	Japanese (n = 49) Mean	American (n = 48) Mean	t
1. Women are capable of handling both home and career.	3.59	3.64	-0.25	3.57	4.25	-3.95***
2. Difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife is employed outside the home.	3.30	3.05	1.08	3.27	2.75	2.18*
3. A wife should NOT work outside the home when her husband wants her home.	3.58	3.11	2.13*	3.78	2.91	3.93***
4. A wife or mother should NOT work outside the home when she doesn't want to work outside the home.	3.50	4.22	-4.50***	3.61	4.17	-3.28**
5. Married women should be home, having or raising children, instead of being employed outside the home.	3.04	2.19	4.17***	2.98	2.06	4.09***
6. Maternal employment is likely to have harmful effects on children's development.	3.28	3.08	0.96	3.24	2.50	3.49***
7. A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is an infant in the family.	3.98	4.03	-0.21	3.86	3.77	0.38
8. A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is a preschool-age child in the family.	3.68	3.76	-0.37	3.69	3.51	0.79
9. A mother should NOT work outside the home if there is a school-age child in the family.	3.48	3.16	1.40	3.56	3.02	2.42*
10. A mother should NOT work outside the home if there is a teenage child in the family.	3.46	2.89	2.51*	3.53	2.81	3.34**
11. I could be happy as a full-time housewife-househusband.	3.36	2.50	4.20***	3.55	3.15	1.69

Note: Likert scale scoring, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001